



YOSEMITE

NATIONAL PARK

"When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe."

— John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra*, 1869

PLANNING UPDATE

Volume 26

December 2003

"Despite some temporary construction-related inconveniences, a visit to Yosemite will continue to be breathtaking, instructive, and inspirational."

Dear Yosemite Friends,

This season marks the third anniversary since the *Yosemite Valley Plan* was finalized in December 2000. And while winter is often the season for quiet reflection, it couldn't be a busier time for the National Park Service.

The nearly 250 individual improvements envisioned by the *Yosemite Valley Plan* may take as long as 20 years to complete. But today, we're taking it one job at a time. That means Yosemite Valley—and other areas of the park—will be bustling for several years to come. This edition of the *Planning Update* will detail some of the on-the-ground work occurring right now and in the months ahead.



Not all of our work involves construction. Park teams are also spending the winter preparing for future planning efforts. In 2004, look for discussions relating to the development of a *Tuolumne Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plan*, an updated *Wilderness Management Plan*, and a parkwide campground plan. We are also working on the next phases of our Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP) framework.

Despite some temporary construction-related inconveniences, a visit to Yosemite will continue to be breathtaking, instructive, and inspirational. Come to the park and enjoy its incomparable beauty. At the same time, watch our work unfold, knowing that the dust we're stirring today is helping to preserve and protect this special place for generations of visitors to come.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Tollefson
Park Superintendent

APPEAL RULING ON MERCED RIVER PLAN

In late October, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals presented its ruling on the *Merced Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plan*. The Court upheld the plan's validity regarding the sufficiency of data used in its development, as well as the park's fulfillment of its obligation to cooperate with water pollution agencies, but reversed two decisions of the U.S. District Court. Namely, the park must adopt specific measurable limits on user capacity—either through the plan's Visitor Experience and Resource Protection framework or another process—to conform to the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act user capacity requirement. The Appeals Court also requires that the park redetermine the river area boundaries in the El Portal segment of the river.

These rulings have been remanded to the District Court, which will determine what actions are necessary to comply with the Appeals Court decisions. In 2000, the groups Friends of Yosemite Valley and Mariposans for Environmentally Responsible Growth (MERG) brought about the lawsuit seeking to overturn the plan.

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Kristina Rylands edited this issue with contributions from Randy Fong, Dean Hargis, Bob Schaevitz, Chic Zirjacks, and Don McLarty.

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Works In Progress

CASCADES DIVERSION DAM REMOVAL

Demolition of the deteriorated and flood-damaged Cascades Diversion Dam and associated structures is underway. Visitors to the intersection of the El Portal and Big Oak Flat Roads in the west end of Yosemite Valley will experience a short detour around the construction zone. Complete removal of the dam will involve taking out the dam abutments, the intake structure, and the screenhouse. Once the structures are removed, the river channel located beneath the dam site will be restored to natural conditions. This project is expected to be complete in the spring of 2004. The removal of Cascades Diversion Dam will help restore natural hydrologic processes and the free-flowing condition of the Merced Wild and Scenic River.



NPS photo by Raye Santos

DAM REMOVAL IN PROGRESS

The Cascades Diversion Dam is currently in the process of being removed from the Merced Wild and Scenic River at the far west end of Yosemite Valley.

CURRY VILLAGE AND EAST YOSEMITE VALLEY CAMPGROUND IMPROVEMENTS*

An environmental assessment was issued to the public on September 12, 2003, and public comments were accepted through October 11, 2003. The park is currently in the process of reviewing comments and refining the proposed projects and environmental assessment in response to these comments; a decision document is pending. If approved, the first phase of the project will include 10 new guest cabin-with-bath accommodations in Curry Village and 75-89 new campsites in Upper Pines Campground. Construction of the initial phase of this project would begin in May 2004, with completion planned in early 2005.

EAST YOSEMITE VALLEY UTILITIES IMPROVEMENT PLAN*

This plan provides guidance for development of utility systems in east Yosemite Valley. Public review of the environmental assessment for this project ended on September 2, 2003 and a decision document is pending. Phase 1 of the plan, which constructs a consolidated corridor from Curry Village to the Yosemite Creek Lift Station, is expected to begin in late winter 2004.

LOWER YOSEMITE FALL PROJECT

Construction is ongoing at the Lower Yosemite Fall area. While trail crews rebuild the deck of the main bridge and expand the adjacent viewing terrace, visitors will continue to have access to the western trail and main viewing terrace below Lower Yosemite Fall. Trail crews have also been doing stonework along the eastern trail and bridge approaches. Segments of the improved eastern trail have been graded and recently paved. Visitors passing along Northside Drive will notice the stone columns of the new restroom and Yosemite Falls shuttle bus stop shelter. New footbridges and boardwalks are also under construction along the loop trail. To protect the vegetation in the construction site, National Park Service restoration crews are removing invasive plants and planting native vegetation in disturbed areas. This project is expected to be complete by next fall.

IMPROVED SHUTTLE BUS STOPS

In order to improve the experience of nearly 2.5 million annual passengers on Yosemite Valley's shuttle bus system, construction of new bus stops and shelters is about to begin. Reconstruction of the first 5 of 11 shuttle stops will start in December 2003, including those at the Valley Visitor Center, Sentinel Bridge, Happy Isles, and Mirror Lake. The remaining 6 stops—Yosemite Village, Degnan's Deli, LeConte Memorial Lodge/Housekeeping Camp, those at Curry Village west, and The Ahwahnee—will be completed in spring 2004. Several other stops will be rebuilt over the next three years as part of the Yosemite Lodge and Curry Village reconstruction projects.

YOSEMITE LODGE AREA REDEVELOPMENT*

This project includes improvements to Yosemite Lodge, expansion of Camp 4, relocation of Northside Drive, and design of an Indian Cultural Center. An environmental assessment for the project was released for public review on September 12, 2003 and closed on October 11, 2003. Pending approval, the Yosemite Lodge improvements will be performed in three phases with Phase I construction beginning in spring 2004. Expansion of Camp 4 and the Indian Cultural Center projects are planned for Phase II. Design work is currently in progress for all phases of the Yosemite Lodge Area Redevelopment. Copies of the site development concepts are available online at www.nps.gov/yose/planning.

CURRY VILLAGE EMPLOYEE HOUSING

Tree removal associated with construction of the concession employee housing area at Curry Village has begun. This housing development was called for in the *Yosemite Valley Plan*. The housing area will include 28 one- and two-story buildings, which will be in keeping with the architectural character of the historic Camp Curry area. The final design is complete and construction of housing is scheduled to begin in early summer 2004.



ARTIST DRAWING

Expansion of the new viewing terrace is underway at the base of Lower Yosemite Fall.

Illustration by Dick Cole courtesy The Yosemite Fund

Actions Pending

* As of press time, these planning efforts are pending approval in a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). If signed, each FONSI will be posted on the park's planning web site. Although closed to public comment, the environmental assessments may still be viewed online at www.nps.gov/yose/planning.

You can check out
the latest status on a
number of Yosemite
projects by visiting
www.nps.gov/yose/planning



NPS photo by Kristina Rylands

Stay Informed!

There are a number of ways that you can stay informed and involved in Yosemite National Park planning efforts:

- ☐ Informational fact sheets are available on a number of park projects. Visit online at www.nps.gov/yose/planning/projects/facts.htm or submit a request to the park (see below).
- ☐ Attend future National Park Service open houses in Yosemite Valley to talk with project specialists and take a look at the latest available information. Open houses will resume in early 2004. Watch the park's planning web site for the winter 2004 schedule (www.nps.gov/yose/planning).
- ☐ Sign up to receive the park's periodic electronic newsletter by submitting your email address to the park (see below), or go to www.nps.gov/yose/home.htm.

- Email: yose_planning@nps.gov
- Address: Yosemite Planning
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